PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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EXPLANATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF DEISM.

PRINCIPLES, opinions, and doctrines are frequently considered in a destructive point of light, because they are not well understood. It is a duty which the mind owes to the dignity of its character, to examine and discriminate previous to an ultimate decision, by which sentiments are to be condemned or applauded. Deism is a word which sounds terrible in the ears of those who have been accustomed from early life to contemplate theological opinions, of a nature entirely opposite. Prejudices are in some measure unavoidable appendages of imperfect powers, and when reiterated efforts are made for the purpose of exciting a rancourous spirit against any particular opinions, the mind loses that just equilibrium which leads to fair inquiry, and honest judgment. It hence becomes necessary in developing the principles of a subject that has received any considerable share of popular odium, to state with simplicity, and delineate with correctness the prominent features of such principles. With a view to this point, we proceed to explain the properties of a subject, which has so often excited in christian minds such extreme abhorrence--in doing this there is no intention to impose a creed upon men whose sentiments are similar—we know that among those who believe that the religion of nature is the only true religion, there are shades of difference in their opinions; but these differences are inconsiderable—less, much less, than those which are every day exhibited in every part of the christian world. Be this as it may, however, we have an unquestionable right to state our ideas upon this interesting subject, conceding to all others the same right. "Deism declares to intelligent man the existence of one perfect God, creator and preserver of the universe—that the laws by which he governs the world, are like himself im-

mutable, and of course, that violations of these laws, or miraculous interference in the movements of nature, must be necessarily excluded from the grand system of universal existence—that the creator is justly intitled to the adoration of every intellectual agent throughout the regions of infinite space—and that he alone is intitled to it, having no co-partners who have a right to share with him the homage of the intelligent world. Deism also declares that the practice of a pure, natural, and uncorrupted virtue is the essential duty, and constitutes the highest dignity of man.

That the powers of man are competent to all the great purposes of human existence—that science, virtue and happiness are the great objects which ought to awake the mental energies, and draw forth the moral affections of the human race.

These are some of the outlines of pure Deism, which christian superstition so dreadfully abhors, and whose votaries she would willingly consign to endless torture. But it is built upon a staunch foundation, and will triumphantly diffuse happiness among the nations of the earth, for ages after christian superstition and fanaticism have ceased to spread desolation and carnage through the fair creation of God."

CHARACTERS IN THE CHRISTIAN DRAMA.

The theism of nature is a source of solid reflection to all sedate and contemplative minds. It is bottomed upon the visible universe and furnishes indestructable data for correct theological argumentation. The case however is materially altered if we turn our attention to a system of religion which claims exclusively divine origin; every thing is distorted both in character and in principle, but in nothing more than the variety of characters which possess a diversified influence in the accomplishment of objects, destined in many respects after all to ultimate failure. The christian God appears first and invites reflection and remark. In the records of scripture his character appears suspicious—while he is declared to be the creator infinitely wise and good, he is represented by these sacred writings as a being of irascible passions, possessing a malignant temperament, issuing murdering commands, deciding upon important questions in haste, and recinding his resolutions immediately after, as may be proved in the matter of creation. He first declares it is all very good and soon after that *it repented him that he had made*

man upon the earth and it grieved him at his heart. If it was so excellent in the commencement of the business, by what means did it become so detestable, so very detestable as to excite in the bosom of Jehovah the deepest grief? Christian believers, you ought to solve one question ; if the opinion of your God upon the first view of creation was a correct opinion, and formed upon a comprehensive view of the subject, was there any consistency in subsequent lamentation? To escape from the difficulty it will not do to affirm that man, the noblest part of the creation, apostalised from his God, and this became the ground of his grief;—no if he was omniscient, he knew all this before, and it is loading him with the imbecilities of an imperfect being to make him susceptible of repentence. It represents him in the light of a mechanic trying experiments, and finding at last that all his projects failed, he places a bitter anathama upon the whole, and says that he wishes he had never had any thing to do with it. Who does not see in the character of such a divinity the whimsical description of religious folly and fanaticism! as there are many facts in the old testament which are at war with the moral character of God, and as these facts have been ably commented upon by several writers in def nce of deism or the true religion of nature, we shall pass them over for the present and take another view of the extraordinary characters whose natures and conduct have produced such a commanding influence upon the christian world. There is a strange connection and relationship existing between God the father, the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. We shall endeavour to make a statement of this business, conformable to the doctrines of revelation, and the opinions of the church. It will then be seen more clearly what Judgment ought to be formed concerning the theism of the gospel. If its theism be incorrect or defective, the system itself must be pronounced to be radically erroneous. God is believed to be the creator and author of all things ; christians believe that Jesus Christ is the only begotton son of God and coequal in every point of view with his father ; the Virgin Mary was the mother of Jesus, and as the Roman catholics call her the mother of god. This appellation of the ancient church ought not to be considered as improper ; for God is equal to Jesus and Jesus is equal to God—they are co-essential and coetemal in their existence—the one is as old as the other, and yet God is the father of Jesus, the Virgin Mary is the mother of both of them, and God is the creator of the Virgin Mary! The Holy Ghost is also the father

of Christ, for the scripture maketh affirmation to this point. (See Matthews, Chapter first.)

Thus it is that this system of theology inverts and distorts all ideas of common sense, and leaves to the human heart no fix'd point of confidence on which it can rely with satisfaction, it is important that we believe theological truth—but the fables of antiquity vitiate the heart and overwhelm the judgment of the human understanding.

(To be Continued.)

Great is the mystery of Godliness, or Christianity not intended to enlighten the world—proved from external and internal evidence.

To form a true estimate of the character of christianity, believers ought not only to examine the doctrine and sentiments it contains—but also to ascertain by what means and to what extent it has been propagated in different parts of the world. It is believed that the opinion is current with the majority of believers that christianity embraces by far the greatest part of the human race, and that its diffusion through the world was by means extremely mild and peaceful, partaking even of celestial benevolence. How far this last idea is consistent with truth will be more fully shewn in some future numbers; at present our remarks shall be confined to a moral demonstration of the opinion contained in the caption of this paragraph. It is proper however, first to observe, that the adherents of revealed religion as well as natural theists, hold to the universal goodness of god, and in their fervent ejaculations address him in language demonstrative of this assertion. Their sacred books also declare that his tender mercies are over all the works of his hands—the same books declare that he that believeth not shall be damned. Historical and geographical facts declare that three quarters of mankind have been and still are ignorant of the christian religion. There is then a knotty point for the household of faith to settle; for if the mercies of the creator are universal, and if this mercy is to be experienced only by a belief in christianity, and if by far the greater part of mankind have no knowledge of its principles, how can they believe it? and if they do not believe it they must be damned, and if they are left in a state of moral darkness here, and exposed to a fiery hell of damnation hereafter—where is the truth of the remark that the tender mercies of the lord are over all his works? is there

any mercy in keeping mankind in a state of ignorance and afterward damning them for that ignorance? Yet such is the fact—the Asiatick world contains five hundred millions of human beings, more than half of the human species, and yet all these, with exceptions that amount to nothing, are left to perish in a state of heathenish darkness and ignorance, nothwithstanding the universal charity of the Jewish divinity. But great is the mystery of Godliness, and it may be the mark of a good christian to bow with great humility before what he cannot understand, but it is a mark also of a very foolish man. This proves the truth of what the great apostle Paul asserts, that god has chosen the weak and foolish things of this world to confound the wise and prudent. In farther proof of the truth of our proposition we may cite the sable sons of Africa, another great division of the globe, where all the inhabitants are left in a state of religious darkness, equal to that which the physical powers of the universe have imposed upon the surface of their bodies—the Aborigenes of the western hemisphere have not experienced in a more fortunate manner the benignity of the great Jehovah. They too have been thrust without the circle of his universal goodness, nothwithstanding it is said to embrace all the works of his hands. If it was the intention of the christian god to enlighten the world by this religion, the knowledge of it should have been diffused from pole to pole, should have encircled the globe, spread through every nation and saluted the understanding of every individual of the human race. But the mystery of Godliness, great as it is, works upon a different plan, and no wonder since it is declared in the sacred writings of the christians, that all those out of the pale of the church should be kept in profound ignorance. In proof whereof we cite Mark, chapter 4, verse 11th: unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them. This is abundant proof of an internal kind—it is positive evidence that the christian religion was not given to enlighten the world; but for the express purpose of holding a majority of the world in a state of moral darkness and deplorable ignorance. The consequence of this is that they must be damned because their sins could not be forgiven, and of course great is the mystery of Godliness, so very great as to surpass every clear view of the powers of reason, and the principles of justice.

APHORISMS.

MAN is born ignorant—it is the expansion of his intellectual powers that constitutes his glory and his happiness.

SCIENCE is the sun of the moral world; when its rays shall have penetrated the darkness of every understanding, a new æra will be commenced in history, and man will become universally the friend of sensative existence.

SUPERSTITION has shed the blood of millions—she must answer for her crimes at the bar of reason, and there she will receive a condemnatory sentence—depart ye cursed and trouble the world no more.

IF the murders which have been committed in the name of religion could be placed distinctly before the minds of believers, it would least induce this interrogatory—is that religion holy and divine whose effects have been so destructive among the human race.

THE energy of thought will one day teach fanaticism that her native home is hell!

WAR is the curse and scourge of the world—yet revealed religion has generated more wars than any other cause by which they have been produced.

WE look at all mankind through the mirror of history—but he who reads history without discriminative reflection, might as well pass away his existence under the influence of the morphean God.

WHY does superstition calumniate philosophy? *Answer*, because philosophy teaches the purest morals.

PHILOSOPHY labors to convince by mild and peaceful means —religious fanaticism by fire and faggot.

PHILOSOPHY teaches that belief must be founded upon evidence—christianity destroys this moral axiom, in the sentence, he that believeth not shall be damned.

IF meekness consist in murder, then was Moses a meek man.

HUMAN merit is in proportion to talents and virtues—celestial merit cannot be transferred from heaven to earth.

"THE unjust man shall perish in his rapacity, and the tyrant in his usurpation."

THE following to our subscribers in Baltimore was unintentionally omited in the first number. When the proposals for this paper were first issued, Baltimore was mentioned as the place of its publication; finding however, that by far the greatest number of subscribers were in this city, and the adjacent country—this circumstance we presume will form a sufficient apology for commencing the paper here, in preference to any other place.

The following prize Subjects are proposed by the Maryland Society for promoting useful knowledge.

1st. The History of the State of Maryland.

2d. The best mode of punishing criminals.

A gold medal with an appropriate motto, and relief, will be adjudged to each of the best productions on those subjects, received previous to the first of January, 1805. Candidates for the above prizes will be pleased to direct their paper to Dr. John Owen, secretary of the society at Baltimore, and annexed to them a sealed note, containing the author's name and residence, under cover of directions for the disposal of the papers in case they fail to obtain a prize.

FOR sale by the editor, (price 1 dollar) at No. 26 Chatham-street, the PRINCIPLES OF NATURE, or a Developement of the Moral Causes of Happiness and Misery among the Human Species, second edition, with five new chapters, upon the following subjects:—Origin of Moral Evil, and the means of its Ultimate Extirpation from the Earth; that Moral Principles are not founded upon Theological Ideas, nor upon any Sectarian Modification of these Ideas, but upon a basis as immortal and as indestructible as Human Existence itself; Universal Benevolence; Moses, Jesus, and Mahomet; Philosophical Immortality.

PUBLIC DISCOURSES,

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